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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed children's picture books in order to determine the extent to which they reflect the changing roles of fathers in the family. Thirty books with a father as a main character and a publication date between 1980 and 1990 were randomly selected. Six possible father roles were determined. These were housekeeper, caregiver, companion, bread winner, absent father, and father who lives elsewhere. Ninety percent of the books showed fathers as companions to their children. Sixteen percent depicted the father in the traditional breadwinner role. These findings indicate that the authors of children's picture books are reflecting changing attitudes and behaviors of fathers. A list of the books used in the study, and a bibliography of 10 items, are provided. (BC)

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THE ROLE OF FATHERS IN THE FAMILY
AS PORTRAYED BY AUTHORS OF CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

by

Violet R. Blair

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Informative Abstract

A content analysis of thirty (30) children's picture books from 1980-1990 showed that the father's role in the family has changed from that depicted in earlier studies. Ninety percent of the books showed that fathers are companions to their children. Only sixteen percent of the books depicted the traditional family. The picture books used in this study reflect changing attitudes and behaviors of fathers.

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Introduction

The picture book is a part of growing up, a teaching tool, an entertaining medium, and a memory to treasure. Children's conceptions, attitudes and expectations of what fathers are and do are formed in part by the image of the father in the stories they hear or read and the pictures they see. Thus books play a significant role in the lives of young children.

The family structure in our society is changing from the traditional pattern of father going off to work and mother staying home to take care of the children. As mothers become breadwinners too, the role of fathers also changes. They participate in the care of the children and the house-keeping chores more frequently. More and more newspaper and magazine articles on the topic of the changing role of fathers are appearing. An example is a recent article in the Chicago Tribune titled "The New Fathers: Joining the Struggle to Juggle Careers and Parenthood."

Are children's picture books realistically reflecting this change in their portrayal of fathers? Do the books show fathers in participative parental roles as well as the traditional provider role most common in the past? Unrealistic portrayals add to the

confusion of what fathers should do or be. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to analyze children's picture books to determine the extent to which they reflect the changing roles of fathers. The hypothesis is: children's picture books accurately reflect the father's role in a changing family structure.

Assumptions

The following assumptions were made by the researcher during the course of this study:

Arlington Heights Memorial Library collection is representative of children's titles.

The thirty picture books used in the study are representative of most picture books about fathers.

Review of the Literature

Hamilton summarizes the significance of the father's role in the family:

Many contemporary observers suggest that today's fathers are becoming more involved in child rearing as the traditional dichotomy between male and female roles in the family weakens. Parents are in a unique position to be the most powerful single source of influence on a child, and the only consistent influence the child is exposed to throughout childhood. While the popular impression of the mother as more influential with children than the father is probably accurate for most families, the father remains actually or potentially the second greatest influence on

the child rather than the minor influence assumed in much contemporary literature.

As people look to the child-rearing situation for prevention of the human problems so widespread in our society, it is vital that the father's influence be viewed more realistically. The research available points strongly to a series of behaviors which, if practiced by fathers as well as mothers, seem likely to go far toward reducing our frequent ineffectiveness in the socialization of children.¹ (Hamilton, 1977)

Naomi Gilpatrick published an article in 1969 titled Power of Picture Book to Change Child's Self-Image. In this study, the text was analyzed for its literary strategies and meaning. The conclusion was that the picture book has the power to build new self-images for the young child.

Thomas and Margaret Yawkey summarize the issue of the influence of picture books on children:

The impact of these materials upon the development of all young children regardless of race, sex, and socio-economic status seems to be very clear in the current research on the formative years. At an early age, young children are not only developing their intellectual structures but also busily assimilating sex roles and race concepts. At an impressionable age, young children exploring within their physical and social environments develop race concepts and sex roles by the age of five. There is also a great amount of research that shows literary materials can develop and shape attitudes of children toward themselves and others.² (Yawkey, 1976)

This has implications for current and future generations of young children. Attitudes are formed early and can be very difficult to change. A negative,

absent or disinterested role model can affect the image a child has about fathers. Even though children's primary source of information about fathers and what they do would come from their own fathers, the picture book plays an important role very early in their lives.

In an earlier study, Thomas and Margaret Yawkey analyzed picture books to determine their impact on young children's attitudes in relation to sex roles and race concepts. Fifty-two books were rated, half of them published before 1965, and the other half after that date. Significant differences were noted between the two groups of books regarding race concepts, but traditional sex roles were portrayed the same in both the old and newer groups of books. The book authors were apparently reflecting changes in race concepts, but seemed to ignore sex roles. The fact that more women were choosing careers and entering the work world was not reflected in picture books. Children were still being influenced by the ongoing portrayal of traditional sex roles. (Yawkey, 1976)

In 1981, a study by Joe Hurst analyzed the extent to which picture books present positive images or role models to young readers. He used the Caldecott Medal winners from the years 1958-1978 and twenty other books published during those years. The Caldecott Medal is awarded annually to the artist of the most

distinguished American picture book published in the United States.

Hurst concluded that stereotypes regarding sex, race and age were predominant and made a statement strongly related to this study. He states that "not one male character is shown doing household chores."³ (Hurst, 1981)

If children's books never show male characters helping around the house, children could easily assume they are never expected to. This could be quite confusing to the child who lives in a home where father and brother help with household chores.

Since ten years have passed, role models of fathers in picture books may have changed. The purpose of this study was to determine how authors of picture books from 1980-1990 are portraying the role of fathers in the family. Expected results were that stereotypes in picture books accurately reflect the father's role in the care of home and children.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study picture books will be those cataloged as Picture or Easy books in the library.

The term "traditional family" refers to a family which includes a father as bread winner and a mother as full time housekeeper and caretaker of the children.

The word "participative" regarding the role of fathers refers to the participation of the father in all aspects of the family including child care and housekeeping.

Hypothesis

The role of the father in the family shown in picture books from 1980-1990 will be depicted as actively involved in the care and nurturing of their children.

Methodology

Content analysis was used to determine the father's role in the family in thirty (30) books. The six possible father roles to be analyzed were empirically determined.

The thirty (30) books used in this study were randomly selected on the basis of a father as a main character and the publication date between 1980-1990. They were selected through the use of the card catalog in the Children's Department of the Arlington Heights Memorial Library, a public library in Arlington Heights,

Illinois. The subject headings used were Fathers, Fathers and Daughters, and Fathers and Sons.

This method of selection is limited by the collection of the library and the availability of these books at the time. The books also reflect the preferences of this library and its selection committee. The assumption was that the picture books sampled were reasonably typical of all picture books about fathers in the family.

A checklist was compiled listing the six possible father roles. A check mark was placed in the "Yes" column for each father role represented in the book. Following is an example of that checklist.

Figure 1 - Content Analysis of Picture Books

Author -

Title -

Copyright Date -

Father is portrayed as....	YES	COMMENTS
housekeeper		
care giver		
companion		
bread winner		
absent		
lives elsewhere		

The definition of each category is as follows:

Housekeeper - The father would be shown doing any household chore including such things as cleaning and cooking.

Care Giver - This category includes any activity that shows the physical or emotional care of children such as bathing, feeding or cuddling.

Companion - An activity that shows the father playing with or taking the child places for enjoyment.

Breadwinner - The fathers job is a main focus of his involvement with the family.

Absent - The father is deceased or his whereabouts are unknown.

Lives Elsewhere - The father lives away from the child, but visits or has the child visit him.

Results

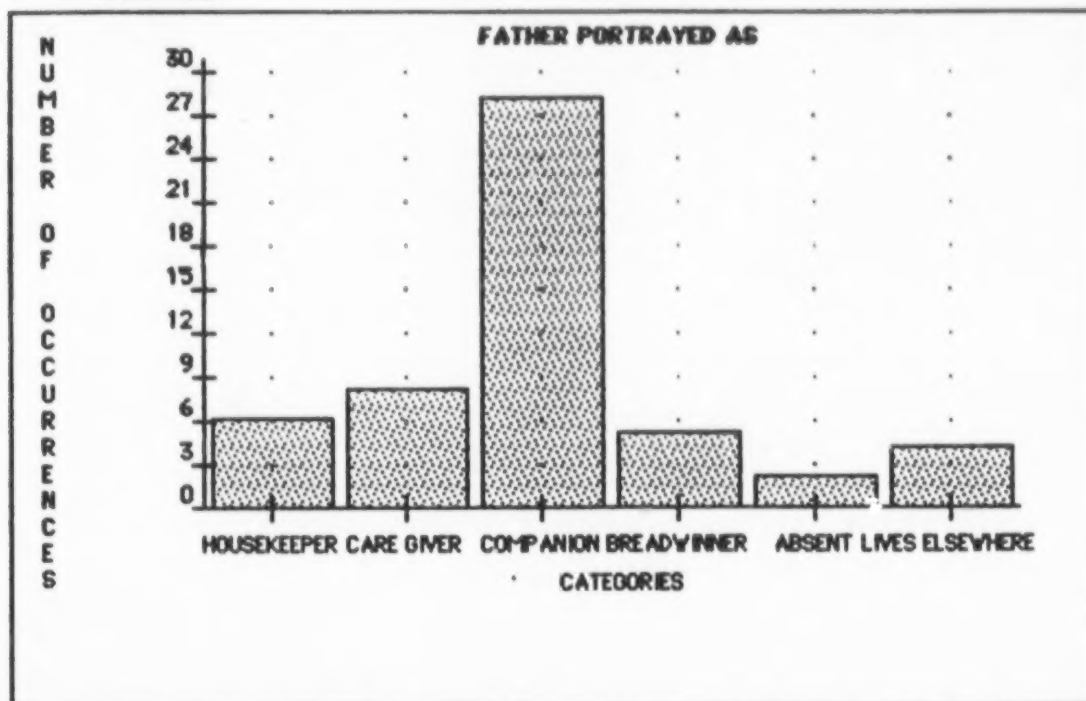


Figure 2 - This graph represents the results of tabulating the check list used for each book.

By taking each category from the check list and converting the graph results to percentages it is easier to compare the results with previous studies or current information on father roles.

Fathers were most often portrayed as companions by an overwhelming majority of the books used in the study. In 90% of the books companionship was the relationship the father had with his child. Children's picture book authors are portraying fathers who do things with their children, such as playing games or taking them places. This implies a caring relationship between the children and the father. In 26% of the books fathers were portrayed as caregivers. These fathers are personally taking care of their children's physical needs. Only 20% of the books showed fathers helping with the housekeeping. The traditional breadwinner role was only seen in 16% of the books. In 6% of the books the father is not present, only referred to as deceased or his whereabouts unknown. Fathers lived away from their children in 13% of the books.

The overall results did show fathers involved with their children, but infrequently as caregivers or housekeepers. Fathers were portrayed as actively involved with their children. However, the involvement is not in the area of caregiver or housekeeper, so the

portion of the hypothesis about care & nurturing is not supported by the data.

Conclusion

The present data corroborates the findings of specialists who study the family. The portrayal of fathers in picture books reflects the father's role in families today.

Levine and Hochschild define 'The New Fathers' as men who attempt to make child rearing an important part of their lives. They state that no more than 20% of men fully share with their wives the responsibility and chores of child-rearing. The picture books closely reflect that with 26% of fathers portrayed as caregivers. In 20% of the books fathers are shown doing housekeeping chores. This is a definite change from the 1981 study by Joe Hurst where none of the male characters were shown doing household chores in picture books from 1958-1978. It is significant that picture books in the 1980's do show fathers engaged in household chores when the previous study showed none at all. The 20% may seem minor, but it is noteworthy when compared with 0% from the 1981 study. It is also interesting to note that only 16% of fathers were depicted as bread-winners. Certainly this contrasts with the image of the traditional family.

If the categories of absent father and fathers who live away from their children are put together the total is 19%. This compares closely to the 1989 statistics of the Bureau of the Census which lists 21.5% of children under 18 who live with their mother only. This is an example of the picture book authors reflecting changes in the family structure in our society.

The final conclusion from this study is that authors of picture books are reflecting changing attitudes and behaviors of fathers in their books. This has a positive effect on children's attitudes about families, their father's role in the family, and changing family structures.

Book List

- Asch, Frank. Goodnight Horsey. 1981.
- Asch, Frank. Just Like Daddy. 1981.
- Barrett, John. Daniel Discovers Daniel. 1980.
- Baum, Louis. One More Time, 1986.
- Browne, Anthony. Gorilla. 1983.
- Buckley, Helen E. Someday With My Father. 1985.
- Carle, Eric. Papa, Please Get the Moon for Me. 1986.
- Clifton, Lucille. Everett Anderson's Goodbye. 1983.
- Dupasquier, Phillipe. Dear Daddy. 1985.
- Girard, Linda Walvoord. At Daddy's on Saturdays. 1987.
- Haseley, Dennis. My Father Doesn't Know About the Woods and Me. 1988.
- Hines, Anna Grossnickle. Daddy Makes the Best Spaghetti. 1986.
- Jukes, Mavis. Like Jake and Me. 1984.
- Long, Earlene. Gone Fishing. 1984.
- Martin, Bill, Jr. and Archambault, John. White Dynamite & Curly Kid. 1986.

Ormerod, Jan. Dad's Back. 1985.

Ormerod, Jan. Messy Baby. 1985.

Ormerod, Jan, Reading. 1985.

Ormerod, Jan. Sleeping. 1985.

Parenteau, Shirley. I'll Bet You Thought I Was Lost.
1981.

Simon, Norma. I Wish I Had My Father. 1983.

Stecher, Miriam B. & Alice S. Daddy and Ben Together.
1981.

Steptoe, John. Daddy is a Monster Sometimes. 1980.

Thomas, Ianthe. Willie Blows a Mean Horn. 1981.

Tyler, Linda Wagner. When Daddy Comes Home. 1986.

Vigna, Judith. I Wish Daddy Didn't Drink So Much. 1988.

Watanabe, Shigeo. Daddy, Play With Me. 1984.

Watanabe, Shigeo. Where's My Daddy? 1982

Yolen, June. Owl Moon. 1987.

Zinnemann-Hope, Pam. Let's Play Ball, Ned. 1987.

Endnotes

- ¹Hamilton, Marshall L., Father's Influence on Children. Chicago, Nelson Hall, 1977, pp. 15, 170-1.
- ²Yawkey, Margaret and Thomas, "An Analysis of Picture Books," Language Arts (May, 1976): 545-8.
- ³Hurst, Joe B., "Images in Children's Picture Books." Social Education 45 (February, 1981): 140.

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